

April 30, 2015

The Honorable Kurt Heise
Chairman, Criminal Justice Committee
N-699 House Office Building
Lansing, MI 48933

The Honorable Vanessa Guerra
Minority Vice-Chair, Criminal Justice Committee
N-1199 House Office Building
Lansing, MI 48933

Dear Chairman Heise and Vice-Chair Guerra:

On behalf of Justice Fellowship, the advocacy arm of the late Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship, I am writing to express our support for House Bills 4419 and 4420. The proposed bills will advance more proportionate accountability, limit dangerous prison overcrowding, reunite broken families, and save resources that can better be used for protecting victims and preventing crime.

Crime causes harm at multiple levels of society and demands accountability. Punishment should be proportionate to the offense, and should aim to restore all parties impacted by crime and incarceration. The current additional mandatory minimum sentences applied for possession of a firearm, in addition to the sentence for the underlying felony offense, are not achieving these goals and have resulted in men and women serving excessive sentences at the expense of families, communities, and all Michigan taxpayers. This disproportionate punishment violates our values of liberty and justice and is detrimental to family and community flourishing.

House bills 4419 and 4420 are an opportunity to restore proportionality in the Michigan criminal justice system without impeding our ability to combat crime and protect victims. The proposed bills would not change the base felony sentences. The legislation would allow judges to make an individualized determination whether to apply additional time for firearm possession based upon the facts of the case. The bills would impose a statutory maximum for firearm possession and the sentencing guidelines would still apply.

In addition to advancing our values, these sentencing reforms offer practical benefits by addressing the unsustainable growth in the state prison system. The Michigan prison population stands at 50,200 men and women and is projected to grow to 56,000 in the next five years. Overcrowding puts corrections officials and prisoners at risk and makes it more difficult to operate effective faith-based and other recidivism-reduction programs. Thus, failing to reduce the state prison population is a failure to protect public safety.

The growing number of incarcerated men and women in Michigan also comes at a severe fiscal price. It costs \$5 million dollars per day and \$2 billion per year to run the Michigan prison system. These are resources that could be better spent on law enforcement, prosecution, victims' services, and programs proven to reduce recidivism.

As the world's largest prison ministry, we witness the human cost of disproportionate punishment first-hand as we visit those who are in prison, care for their families, and provide a

support network for formerly incarcerated men and women who have returned to our Michigan communities. We long for a justice system that comprehensively reflects restorative justice principles, including proportionate accountability. We believe the proposed bills are an important step toward that goal and urge all members of the Michigan Legislature to support their passage. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CDH', with a long, horizontal, wavy line extending to the right.

Craig Deroche
Executive Director
Justice Fellowship/Prison Fellowship Ministries